Letter from Taizé

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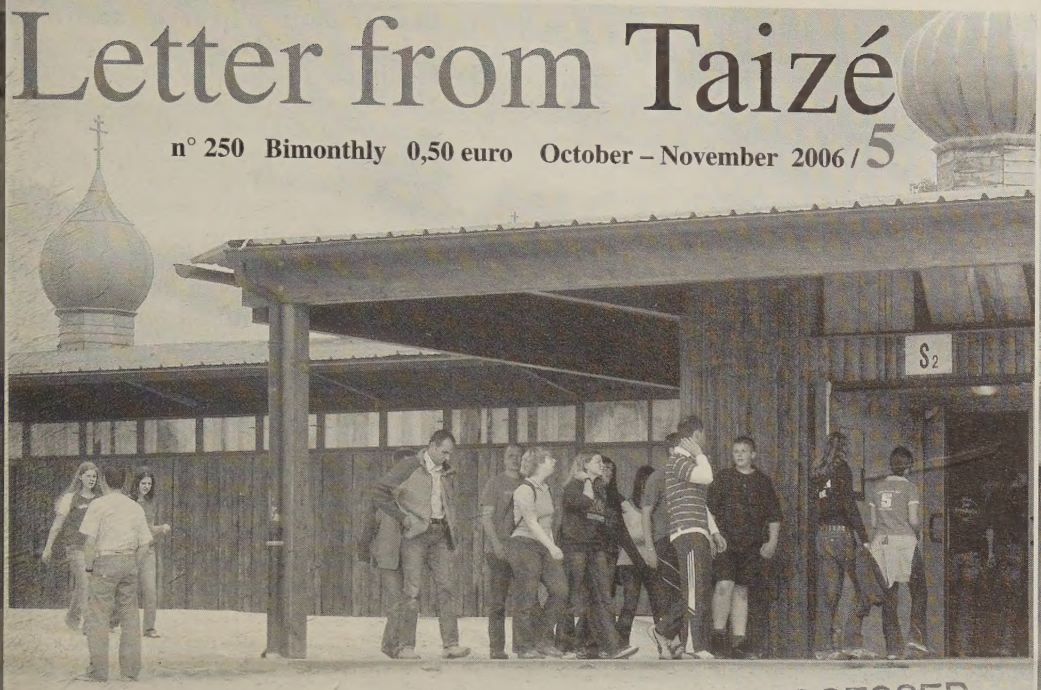

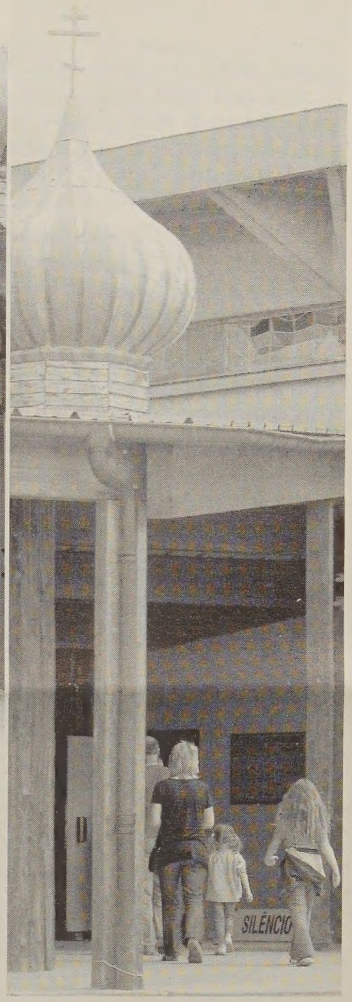

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ROMANIAN ORTHODOX IN TAIZÉ

A "Bridge" Between East and West

Once again this summer, hundreds of young people from Romania spent a week in Taizé. The great diversity of the inhabitants of that country was visible: Orthodox, Latin- and Eastern-rite Catholics, Reformed Christians, Hungarians from Transylvania...

Most of the population of Romania is Orthodox and that is visible in Taizé. The Romanians are the only Orthodox who speak a Romance language. They feel that they have the responsibility of being a "bridge" between East and West. Once or twice a week, the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom was celebrated in Romanian, in the small village church. The liturgy is at the heart of their life of faith: for two hours everything stops, as if heaven touched earth. The life of the women and men of our time is presented to God, with their cares and their sorrows, and people leave "bearing peace". The Byzantine tradition is rich and beautiful. Some young people say that in Taizé, paradoxically, they were able to begin to rediscover the beauty of the treasure which is theirs and to have the desire to go deeper, to go to the source of this life and this joy present at the heart of the praise of God's people. We have recorded the testimonies of three young people from Bucharest.

Octavian: my parish is my family

What is beautiful in my parish is the peace, the quiet, and the feeling I have of being at home. It is a place where I feel close to God, also because I sense the support of others. It's my family. During the major feasts we feel an immense joy. The joy of those who come regularly to church is doubled by the presence of those who come less frequently. All the spaces in the church are full, even the furthest corners. They are filled with new faces. And in our parish there are people who do all they can to make them feel welcome.

In general, people in Taizé do not know that the great majority of the Romanian people are Orthodox. But very quickly, we realize that barriers between denominations fall, and what matters is that we are all Christians. The outward form of prayer is different, but before coming to Taizé for the first time I expected that. I imagined that it would be something special, different from what I was familiar with at home. I have always enjoyed getting to know realities different than mine; I have never expected to find similar things in faraway places. Differences enrich me.

I realized only lately that the Church has always protected me. At a certain time in my life, I managed only to see the formalistic side of the Church. Helped by other people, by a spiritual director, by friends, I was able to discover something else. That period coin-

cided with my first visit to Taizé. I realized that faith could be expressed in a way that was less formalistic. I could have discovered that at home, but at that time my eyes were not prepared. It was an opportune moment for me to return to the life of my parish. Once a priest told me that we should not go to church because it pleases us, or because it pleases others, but because it pleases God. If the important thing is pleasing God, then all the rest becomes relative. The challenge is to discover what is true in apparently rigid acts.

Cristina: not judging and not feeling judged

Taizé taught me not to judge and not to feel judged. Before, I was afraid to do things in church that were out of place, to make mistakes. If I feel at ease at Taizé, that means that I can also feel at ease at home. But I must also be attentive not to judge others. I think that too is what changed after I came to Taizé.

Daniel: a great thirst for God

In the Orthodox Church, we feel that there is a kind of uninterrupted link with the Fathers of the Church. Reference is constantly made to this treasure. We feel that we are in communion with the Christians of the first centuries. There is a mystical life, a thirst for inner seeking, which goes on at the same time as outer activities.

In Taizé I learned to find God through a life with others. In large cities the community spirit can get lost. It is hard for priests to know each parishioner and it is hard for the faithful to feel that they really belong to a community. In Taizé the diversity is even greater but you manage to feel in communion with everybody. You become open to all; you can understand God's love for all. At Taizé I also discovered a different way of being a monk. I expected to find another kind of monk there: men more concerned with the search for inner peace than with welcoming others. In the monasteries of Romania there also exists a witness and religious instruction, but it could be more developed. Many people visit the monasteries, especially on weekends, and you sense an immense thirst for God.

At Taizé I discovered the joy of a simple prayer, prayer face to face. People pray in this way at home too, but often they look for moments of communion with God outside of community celebrations. It would be beautiful to invite people to have this personal relationship with God during the celebrations.

A WORKSHOP IN TAIZÉ

Towards an Interdependent and Sustainable Economic Development

Michel Camdessus, a specialist in worldwide economic questions, former director of the International Monetary Fund and member of the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Pace, spent two days in Taizé with his wife to help the community and the young people reflect on worldwide economic issues. Some echoes of the workshops he led are transcribed here:

Is constant economic growth compatible with a responsible management of the resources of our world? What roads exist for a sustainable and interdependent development of the planet?

Our societies are more and more aware of the need to preserve the natural resources of the planet and to promote new forms of development; at the same time, people constantly speak of the need to jump-start the economy by means of growth and consumption. Is there not a contradiction between these two aims?

In these questions you find ecological demands, worries about the rhythm of development, holes in the ozone layer and the growing awareness of the need for sustainable development which is a concept that is almost constitutional after the Rio (1992) and Johannesburg (2002) summits. I would like to begin by saying "Hallelujah!"It is important that world public opinion realizes that economic growth, the accumulation of resources in the North and the South, globally, is not an end in itself. The world did not have this awareness in 1950. This is something new.

Still, it is necessary to be more nuanced. Periodically in the course of its history, humankind was afraid that all of a sudden everything would run out, that there would be a gap between the number of mouths to be fed and the available resources. That was the great worry of Malthus: we have to limit demographic growth or else there will no longer be enough for everyone. What is striking about the current situation, which is a reaction calling for a change of civilizations, is that people have realized that the idea of economic development previously dominant was extraordinarily narrow and insufficient. When people started speaking of development with respect to the poor countries, it was at the beginning of the 1950s. The model of development desired, debated and organized then was simply the Soviet model, quantitative planning. People thought: "We need to produce more; if the pie is larger, there will be more for everyone." And that was all there was to it. Today we realize how inadequate that is.

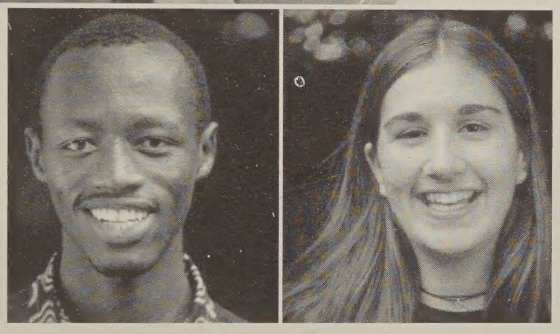
An end to indebtedness

Another inadequate notion which we are just beginning to criticize: over the last twenty-five years, in many European countries, people looked for a solution to our problems by going into debt, in public deficits. Many economists called that Keynesianism, though it is in fact a debased vision of the thought of Keynes.

Taking account of human beings in economy implies that we must not impose today on the coming generations, on our children whom we miseducate and mistreat, the burden of reimbursing our current frivolousness. I say this to my fellow Frenchmen: in France at present simply reimbursing the debt we have accumulated in the course of the last twenty-five years absorbs 100% of the taxes on revenue. The French feel this tax is too heavy; it goes entirely to reimburse the national debt. That is annoying for us today but it will be still more of a problem for the next generation, especially if we keep on doing this. We are going to bequeath to them a shrunken universe. Instead of spending more to prepare their own future, to be more generous towards the rest of the world, to deal with the costs of health care linked to the aging of the population, to pay for our own retirement, they are going to have to tighten their belts even more. Since we already know that they will have to deal with the burden of an aging population, we should bequeath to them a financial situation that is much more healthy.

Linking growth, social cohesion and preservation of the environment

Behind the demand for sustainable development there is an awareness of the fact that the economy must be humanized, be at the service of people of today and tomorrow, and that it must be made compatible with social cohesion and the preservation of the environment. That was illustrated very well by the report of the commission of Mme. Brundtland, prime minister of Norway at in the 1980s. The report said that instead of having a single driving force, growth and the accumulation of goods, the economy must have these three driving forces: growth, social cohesion and the preservation of the environment and of future generations. The economy becomes a kind of troika. The problem is that the three horses all pull in opposite directions! You need growth but it must be limited in order to preserve the people of today and tomorrow; you need to preserve the environment but you also have to produce enough because the problem of poverty is here today. So it is necessary to head towards a more complex conception or approach to the economy, integrating concern for the people of today and tomorrow more deeply.



Many people say on ideological grounds that the answer is no growth at all, zero growth: you go off somewhere with a few goats. But the world was given to us as an ongoing creation; we have to work to make the world more human, and this also involves struggling against poverty. The principal pollution is the faces of poverty across the world. For this reason, the world has to grow quantitatively, if only to deal with the problem of poverty at home and elsewhere. We have to walk on a knife's edge. You will be told: okay, growth, but as little as possible. Where is the limit? The limit is hard to find. What we know is that when the rate of growth drops beneath a certain point, social cohesion is seriously jeopardized. In France for example, the rate of growth that can be maintained without unleashing inflation is around 2.25%. If we want to prepare the future well, finance our own pensions better—since we are going to live to the age of 95, instead of 60 as was the case when the pension system was begun in France—if we want to deal with health care costs that are growing in an extremely rapid way, we need to grow at about 3%. As soon as the growth rate descends to about 1.5% things start to go haywire. The State is tempted to use all means possible to stimulate growth, for instance boosting its own consumption to give the impression it is doing something, but this is at the expense of the next generations. If growth does not reach a minimum level, then, we are not able to cope with the problems of social cohesion, of peace in society.

This shows that in today's complex societies, things have to be regulated, but it involves as well the different forms of social discipline that lay behind this. People are easily convinced that we must stop laying burdens on the shoulders of the next generation, which is already mistreated: if you analyze the problems of social cohesion, you will see that the young are the principal victims of injustice.

Consumption is not the only driving force of growth

The question is to know how to escape this too narrow equation growth/consumption, which in fact is not correct. There are other driving forces of growth: investments in the future, supporting poor countries—when we support them, they purchase from us, and a virtuous circle of development takes place. This is not pure theory, as the example of Ireland shows. When Ireland entered the European Union, we supported it strongly and now it is the richest country per capita; its prosperity nurtures our prosperity. We need to go towards these models of growth, uniting more the spirit of solidarity and frugality with a more daring worldwide approach to the problems that confront us in the narrow equations of our national policies.

This model of economic development is compatible with a responsible management of the resources of our planet. It is irresponsible to manage certain resources of the planet as we manage them today: of course a lot of money is made

by selling wood from the forests of the Himalayas, from the Congo basin or from Amazonia, but it is irresponsible; we ruin the future of these countries and we already see the ecological consequences. The road of sustainable development is the road of solidarity. We speak of sustainable and interdependent development, but in reality development is sustainable because it is interdependent.

Our generation and the following ones are called to take care of the world; they must be ambitious and accept the risk of the Creator. The Creator took an incredible risk in creating the world; we must accept the risk of being creators of a new world. It is essential not to discourage the young, overwhelmed as they are by the complexities and incomprehensibility of the world. They need to be encouraged to take risks, to accept utopias. I want to explain this dangerous word; as soon as you pronounce it people say "He's a dreamer, calm down, listen to him politely, that doesn't commit us to anything."

Utopias with verifiable results

I think that we have to let the young find their own utopias and suggest simply that they take care that they are *utopias with verifiable results*. A good utopia fixes a calendar and meeting points every year, so that to the utopia is attached a discipline of joint actions. An ambitious vision of the world can be maintained if a discipline of action and verification is joined to it.

I have had some experiences of that kind in my life. It is important to realize that in the final analysis, when you head towards a utopia with that kind of discipline, to put it into practice is child's play. People are ready to go along with you, to help change the world a little bit. One of the things I sense here in listening to the young is that we frighten them, we tell them too often that everything is corrupt, that the world is finished. No, the world is just beginning; we have to build it; the generations that went before us had to deal with situations that were no clearer than those we face today. Beyond the human wisdom on the level of which I am speaking at the moment, we have a hope, we have to go forward, there is no other choice!

BIBLE MEDITATIONS

November 2006: Exodus 19: 1-8

After liberating them from slavery in Egypt, God leads the Israelites into the wilderness. There is nothing to do there, nothing to see, nobody else. It is the place where an encounter with God is possible. God calls the nation to bear witness to himself, inviting it to recognize the divine presence and will in its history.

Then God reveals to the Israelites his desire for an even deeper intimacy with them, which he himself cannot decide or bring about but for which they have to be responsible. God does not simply want to be called upon when he is needed, or thanked because of his help in the past, but freely chosen. God is ready for a privileged relationship with this people and is waiting for them to open their hearts to him freely.

The covenant with God does not depend upon his partner doing something (acting in a certain way, worship, mission…) but upon listening to God's voice and thus discerning what God wants. This process is begun by rejecting the other voices, fears, dreams or calculations, in order to give priority to that.

God does not destine Israel to become a model of organization, of morality or of culture but to be the living sign of his Covenant among the nations—to live together to the point of wanting the same thing.

Without calculation or explanation, God undertakes the commitment to watch over, care for, protect and bless Israel in a special way among all the nations. God intends to make all the Israelites priests and saints: servants of communion with others, completely open and dedicated to God, able to welcome him fully and devote their entire existence to him.

Accepted by each person, this offer leads to an agreement and cements Israel's unity in the expectations and the designs of God. It makes this tiny nation the visible sign of those designs at the heart of human history.

- How does Jesus live out God's expectations, designs and covenant?
- In what way does God invite me to make a covenant with him?
- How can my Christian community fulfill its calling to be a people of priests, a holy nation?

December 2006: Galatians 3: 27-28

In order to have points of reference, to find their place, to be reassured, human beings organize the world into categories; they classify and define. Some find their identity in opposition to others. For Christians, that world has come to an end in Christ. "There is no longer 'Jew or Greek,' 'slave or free'…." We would err if we thought that Paul was simply speaking about a change in the way of seeing the world, a different viewpoint by which we free ourselves from prejudices and open up to reality to a greater extent. Some philosophers aspired to such breadth of vision. But Paul is talking about something else. Not a new point of view, but a new reality: "you are all one in Christ Jesus." As a result of this, personal identity and the world must be rethought, not in opposition to others but with this unity as a starting-point.

In his letter to the Galatians, what interests Paul above all is the end of the opposition between Jews and non-Jews (Greeks). Losing this basic reference-point, a religious one, can be a wrenching experience. Paul will go so far as to say that the world (the old world, defined by oppositions) has been crucified for him (6:14); it no longer exists. A new world has come into being with Christ, a new creation (6:15).

The new unity that characterizes this new creation is inseparably bound up with the person of Christ. By baptism we have become members of his Body and therefore united to all the other members of that Body. If Paul can even say "there is no longer 'male and female'," which clearly refers to the creation story in Genesis (1:27), that is because the response to human aloneness is no longer a community of two persons, but that vast community which is being built up in Christ.

From faith in the resurrection, a life of communion springs up. The baptized discover their identity henceforth in that communion. Risen with Christ, they no longer need opponents in order to exist or to define themselves.

- In trying to live out faith in Christ, have you already experienced the loss of old reference-points and the discovery of new ones? Which ones?
- Why do we need opponents? What can free us from that need?

These Bible meditations are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

Holy Spirit, you fill the universe, and in a whisper of silence you say to each person: "Don't be afraid; God's presence is there in the depths of your being. Seek and you will find."

NOVEMBER
DAILY READINGS

1 1 Jn 3:1-3
Wed ALL SAINTS
We are already God's children. What we shall be in the future has not yet been revealed, but we know that we shall be like God because we shall see God as he really is.

2 Rm 14:7-15
Thu While we live, as when we die, we belong to the Lord. For Christ died and returned to life that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

3 Mt 4:1-11
Fri Jesus said to the tempter: It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

4 Is 50:7-9
Sat The Lord is coming to my help. Who then can condemn me?

5 Mk 12:28-34
SUN Jesus said: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as yourself. These are the two greatest commandments.

6 Rm 4:18-25
Mon St. Paul writes: Though there seemed to be no hope, Abraham hoped and believed, being fully convinced that God is able to do what he has promised.

7 Jn 14:22-26
Tue Jesus said: Peace I leave you; my peace I give you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

8 Is 40:25-28
Wed Isaiah says: Why do you complain, my people, saying, "My way is hidden from the Lord, my cause is disregarded by God"? Do you not know? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the world, who does not tire or grow weary.

9 1 Co 3:18-23
Thu Paul writes: All things are yours; but you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.

10 1 P 3:8-17
Fri Proclaim the Lord Christ holy in your hearts and always be ready to answer people who ask you the reason for the hope you have.

11 Jn 14:1-12
Sat Jesus said: The words I say to you are not just my own, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

12 Mk 12:41-44
SUN Jesus saw a poor widow put two small coins into the temple treasury and, calling his disciples, he said, "In truth I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all the others, for they all gave out of their wealth, but she has put in everything she possessed."

13 Ps 69:30-37
Mon You who seek God, may your hearts live! For God listens to the poor.

14 2 Th 1:11-12
Tue May God fulfill every good purpose of yours by his power and complete all that you have been doing by faith.

15 1 P 3:8-12
Wed Do not repay one wrong with another. Seek peace and pursue it.

16 Jn 14:19-23
Thu Jesus said: Anyone who loves me will keep my word, and the Father will love them, and we shall come to them and make our home in them.

17 Lk 9:57-62
Fri Someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus answered, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

18 1 Th 5:12-22
Sat Be always joyful, pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances.

19 Mk 13:24-32
SUN Jesus said: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

20 Ps 138
Mon Lord, you look upon the humble. Though I live surrounded by trouble, you give me life.

21 Ep 1:15-23
Tue May God enlighten the eyes of your heart so that you may see the hope to which he calls you.

22 Is 56:1-7
Wed The Lord says: Let the stranger who has come to me not say, "For sure, the Lord will exclude me from his people." For I shall lead to my holy mountain all those who love God's name and become his servants; I shall give them joy.

23 Is 50:10
Thu Who among you reveres the Lord? Who among you walks in darkness and sees no light? Trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon your God.

24 Ps 26
Fri Examine me, Lord, test my heart and my mind; for your faithful love is before my eyes, and I live my life by your truth.

25 Heb 12:18-24
Sat What you have come to is nothing that can be known to the senses: what you have come to is the city of the living God and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.

26 Jn 18:33-37
SUN Jesus said to Pilate: For this I was born, and for this I came into the world: to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.

27 Ps 39
Mon My hope is in you, Lord, free me from my sins. I keep silence, I will open my mouth no more, for it is you who are at work.

28 Heb 13:1-8
Tue Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have welcomed angels without knowing it.

29 Ps 89:1-30
Wed I shall sing of the love of the Lord for ever; my words shall proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. For your love stands firm for ever, you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself.

30 Mt 4:18-22
Thu St ANDREW
Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of people." And at once they left their nets and followed him.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

DECEMBER

DAILY READINGS

God, you love every human being, and we want to live in communion with you day after day, in silence and in love.

1 Ac 20:17-38
Fri Paul said: Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, who said, "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving."

2 Mt 11:28-30
Sat Jesus said: Come to me, you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.

3 Lk 21:25-36
SUN ADVENT Jesus said: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. Be on the watch and pray at all times.

4 Is 43:1-4a
Mon The Lord says: You are precious in my eyes, I value you and I love you.

5 Rv 21:1-7
Tue God will make his home among human beings; they will be his people and he will be their God.

6 Mt 5:38-48
Wed Jesus said: Love your enemies and pray for those who mistreat you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

7 Mt 6:19-21
Thu Jesus said: Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

8 Ep 1:3-14
Fri God chose us in Christ, before the world was made, to be holy and faultless before him in love.

9 Is 58:5-12
Sat The Lord says: Is that the sort of fast that pleases me: hanging your head like a bending reed? Is not rather this the fast that pleases me: breaking unjust fetters, setting free the oppressed and sharing your food with the hungry?

10 Lk 3:1-6
SUN John the Baptist came as is written in the book of Isaiah: A voice of one who cries in the desert, "Prepare a way for the Lord, make straight his paths!"

11 Ps 27
Mon "Come," my heart says, "seek God's face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek.

12 Jr 33:14-16
Tue Days are coming, says the Lord, when I shall fulfil the promise of happiness I made to my people, and from among them I shall raise one who will do what is just and right in the land.

13 Ps 37
Wed Make the Lord your joy: God will give you even more than your heart's desire.

14 Lv 19:33-34
Thu God says: Love the foreigners among you as you love yourselves.

15 1 P 1:22-25
Fri Peter writes: Love one another deeply, from the heart.

16 Hos 6:3-4,6
Sat The Lord says: I desire faithful love, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.

17 Lk 3:15-22
SUN John the Baptist said: I baptise you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

18 Lk 1:5-25
Mon The angel said to Zechariah, father of John the Baptist: Your wife will bear you a son who will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit and will bring back many people to the Lord their God.

19 Is 40:1-5
Tue Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. The uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together.

20 Lk 1:67-79
Wed At John the Baptist's birth, Zechariah said: Blessed be God, who allows us to serve him without fear.

21 Ep 2:14-18
Thu Christ came to announce the joyful message of peace: peace to those who are far away, peace to those who are near. Through him, in one Spirit, we all have free access to the Father.

22 Jr 1:4-8
Fri The Lord said to Jeremiah: Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you and consecrated you.

23 2 Co 8:7-15
Sat Our Lord Jesus Christ became poor for your sake, so that through his poverty you might become rich.

24 Heb 10:5-10
SUN When Christ came into the world, he said, "See, O God, I have come to do your will."

25 Jn 1:9-18
Mon CHRISTMAS The Word became flesh and lived among us. From God's fullness we have all received.

26 Ac 6:8-15,7:55-60
Tue St STEPHEN As they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And with these words he fell asleep.

27 1 Jn 1:1-7
Wed St JOHN God is light, in him there is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light, we are in communion with one another.

28 Mt 18:1-4
Thu Jesus said: Truly, I tell you, the one who becomes humble like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

29 Mt 5:1-12
Fri Jesus' disciples came to him and he taught them saying: Happy are the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

30 Mt 19:16-22
Sat Jesus said to a rich young man: If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.

31 Lk 2:41-52
SUN When Mary and Joseph found the child Jesus in the Temple, he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

JUDGE NOT!

Why did Jesus tell his disciples not to judge?

"Judge not, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:37). Is it possible to put this Gospel saying into practice? Do we not have to judge, if we do not want to give up trying to change what is not right? But this invitation of Jesus penetrated deep into people's hearts. The apostles James and Paul, different in so many ways, echo it using almost the same words. James writes, "Who are you to judge your neighbour?" (James 4:12). And Paul: "Who are you to judge someone else's servant?" (Romans 14:4).

Neither Jesus nor his apostles wished to abolish law courts. Their maxim concerns daily life. Although the followers of Christ have made the choice to love, they still keep on doing things that are wrong, and this has more or less serious consequences. The spontaneous reaction is then to judge those who, by their negligence, weaknesses or oversights, cause harm or setbacks. We can of course come up with many excellent reasons to judge our neighbours: it is for their own good, so that they may learn and make progress....

Jesus knows the human heart, and he is not taken in by the most hidden motivations. He said, "What are you looking at the straw in your brother's eye for? And the beam in your own eye, do you not notice it?" (Luke 6:41). I can use the faults of others to reassure myself of my own worth. The reasons to judge my neighbour flatter my self-love (see Luke 18:9-14). But if I am on the lookout for my neighbour's smallest mistake, is this not a way of keeping me from facing my own problems? The thousand and one faults that I find in him do not yet prove that I am worth more than him. The harshness of my judgment may only be hiding my own insecurity and fear of being judged.

On two occasions, Jesus spoke of an "unhealthy" or "evil" eye (Matthew 6:23 and 20:15). He was referring to looking at others with jealousy. An unhealthy eye admires, envies and judges one's neighbour all at the same time. When I admire my neighbours for their good points but at the same time am jealous of them, my eye becomes evil. I no longer see reality as it is, and I may even judge someone for an imaginary wrong that he or she has never done.

A desire to dominate can also cause someone to judge. That is why, in the passage already quoted, Paul writes, "Who are you to judge someone else's servant?" Whoever judges their neighbour makes themselves his or her master, and in so doing takes the place of God. We are called instead to "consider others superior to us" (Philippians 2:3). This does not mean putting oneself down, but serving others instead of judging them.

Does refusing to judge others lead to indifference and passivity?

In one and the same phrase, the apostle Paul uses the word judge with two different meanings: "We should stop judging one another; judge rather that you should not put anything before your brother or sister to make them stumble or fall" (Romans 14:13). Ceasing to judge one another does not lead to passivity; it is a precondition for acting and behaving justly.

Jesus does not advise us to shut our eyes and stop trying. Immediately after telling us not to judge, he continues, "Can a blind person be the guide of another blind person? Will not they both fall into a pit?" (Luke 6:39). Jesus wants blind people to be helped to find their way. But he criticizes incompetent guides. These guides, who are a bit ridiculous, are according to the context people who judge and condemn. Without refusing to judge, it is impossible to see clearly and to help others find the right road.

Here is an example drawn from the correspondence of Barsanuphius and John, two monks of Gaza in the sixth century. After having reprimanded a brother for his negligence, John was sorry to see how dejected he was. He is hurt again when, in his turn, he feels that his brothers are judging him. To remain serene, he then decides no longer to criticize anyone else, but simply to take care of the things for which he alone is responsible. But Barsanuphius makes him see that Christ's peace does not mean withdrawing into oneself. He quotes some words of Saint Paul to him several times: "Correct, rebuke and encourage with tireless patience and the concern to instruct" (2 Timothy 4:2).

Leaving others alone can be yet another subtle way of judging them. If I only want to worry about myself, could it not be that I do not consider others worthy of my attention and my efforts? John of Gaza decides not to correct any of his brothers any longer, but Barsanuphius realizes that, in fact, he is still judging them in his heart. He writes to him, "Do not judge or condemn anyone, but admonish them like true brothers" (Letter 21). John will become able truly to be concerned with others when he stops judging them.

"Do not make any premature judgments; wait for the Lord to come" (1 Corinthians 4:5). Paul recommends great restraint in judging. At the same time, he appeals to those to whom he writes to take care of one another: "Admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, assist the weak; be patient with everybody" (1 Thessalonians 5:14). By experience, he knew that reprimanding without judging could be costly: "For three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one of you" (Acts 20:31). Only charity can accomplish this kind of service.

News of the Pilgrimage of Trust

Croatia

Zagreb here!

The European meeting in Zagreb will be held from 28 December 2006 to 1 January 2007. The team preparing the meeting is arriving in the city now: brothers, Sisters of Saint Andrew, and young volunteers from Taizé. They are joined by young adults from the city. We hope to keep bringing you here echoes of the preparation as it being experienced by some of the young people involved in it.

After European meetings in Milan, Budapest or Paris, we wondered among ourselves. "Could something that big and beautiful happen in our hometown some day?" Many doubts and questions arose. How could it be possible in such a small country as Croatia? 4.5 million people is like the population of some of the bigger European cities. And we have been living as an independent country for such a short period of time. Who thinks about opening up to others, about forgiveness and reconciliation now, so soon after the war? And then, it happened. On 31 December 2005, during the European meeting in Milan, Brother Alois announced: "The next European meeting will take place in Zagreb!" And we hardly dared to believe it!

During July and August, young people from different parts of Croatia visited Taizé. Within the regular weekly Taizé rhythm the spirit of the forthcoming meeting was constantly present. Each Thursday, the "contact sheet" was distributed. Many were surprised by some of the questions: Do you have a fridge? What about a bike? Are you maybe a doctor? Can a volunteer who comes with us from Taizé stay at your place for a while? Information was provided on the activities in Zagreb in September and October: possibilities of cooperation, school visits, small meetings in other Croatian towns, prayer groups in parishes were also discussed. We also joined the regional meetings of other countries and invited everyone to come to Zagreb. Many from Poland, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Serbia and Slovenia showed plenty of good will about coming. Some of their questions were really interesting! "Is it dangerous to come to Zagreb?" "Do you still have soldiers in the streets?"!

A small group of young Croatians stayed on in Taizé for some weeks more to help with different aspects of the preparation, including the translation of prayers and the preparation booklet. In August here in Zagreb another big "action" began, the action that is called "food". Many Croatian food producers are being asked about their products. How are all those people who come to the meeting going to be fed? But that is another story... We will keep you up to date!

Practical information on the Zagreb meeting: How to go? How to prepare? See www.taize.fr "Meeting in Zagreb"

Asia

"Nothing is more responsible than praying"

A brother writes:

I have been asked several times over the last few months, "What is it that you actually do? You were in Thailand. What did you do there?" "I was praying with young people. This time, it was in an Orthodox Church". "And when you were in Vientiane?" "Well, basically, we prayed together; one evening in the cathedral, and there too it was with young adults."

In the way they looked at me I could see that those who were asking me these questions were wondering..." "So, in Myanmar?" I was almost embarrassed to say again, "We prayed with young people from all the parishes in the Archdiocese of Yangoon!" "And in Cambodia?"

This time I did not have to reply for they supplied the answer themselves, slightly amused. "No doubt you were praying?"

This made me think quite a bit, for it is quite true to say that "praying with" is almost the only thing I do during these visits. And I remembered some words Brother Roger said and wrote in one of his last letters: "Nothing is more responsible than praying".

Canada

Leaving discouragement behind; finding new hope

A number of Canadians who have been to Taizé or taken part in a Taizé weekend in Canada have been asking: "Would it be possible to organize a weekend in Canada that would bring together young adults from various parts of the country and the U.S.?"

It's a great joy for us to announce that such a weekend is being planned for next year. It will take place in Montreal from the 27th to the 29th April 2007. Cardinal Turcotte, Archbishop of Montreal, the Rt Reverend Barry Clarke, the Anglican bishop of Montreal, and the synod for the United Church of Canada of the Montreal-Ottawa region have already expressed their joy of welcoming such an event. Cardinal Turcotte told a Taizé brother the wonderful memories he had of Brother Roger's visit to Montreal in 1980. Brother Alois will be in Montreal for the meeting.

The weekend will be part of our "pilgrimage of trust on earth" which Brother Roger initiated many years ago as a way of stimulating young adults to become bearers of peace, trust and reconciliation in the places where they live.

On this pilgrimage we have had many opportunities to experience how coming together with many others in order to go to the wellsprings of trust and hope is a way of leaving discouragement behind, coming out of isolation, and creating lasting bonds of communion and friendship.

The meeting is meant for people between 17 and 35 years of age. Those who come from outside Montreal will stay with families. Parishes will take an active part in the welcome.

Information and registration: www.taizemontreal2007.ca

Letter from Taizé

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